

Schools - Partridge
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DUXBURY CLIPPER ANT

Section E

PARTRIDGE ACADEMY AS I KNEW IT

By Gershom Bradford

It is 140 years since the will of the Honorable George Partridge revealed a legacy of \$10,000 for the establishment of an academy to give the youth of Duxbury an education beyond that provided by the prevailing system.

The trustees, in their wisdom, put the funds on interest until, about 15 years, the accumulation was sufficient to construct the academy building that, so long and so charmingly, formed the third member of the Church-Town-House group; exactly on line, equi-distant and architecturally harmonious.

First Contact

My first contact with the Academy came through the friendship of my family with Charles F. Jacobs, the principal in the 1880's. He was a native of Scituate and I believe, a graduate of Colby College. He was an excellent instructor, handsome, dignified, meticulous in his habits and appearance, brought credit to the school and left his imprint on the town. Upon consulting with his pupils in their maturity I found the feeling to be that he leaned too far in the direction of discipline. His control was truly remarkable.

To cite a minor instance: As a small boy I was sent to the Academy with a message. Entering the lobby I timidly knocked on the inner glass door. It was the rule that the last girl on the aisle should answer. At this time it was Miss "Addie" Train (Mrs. Horace Soule of pleasant memory) who tiptoed to respond. I gave my message but being a pupil from the relatively unruly Millbrook School (Legion Hall), my young mind was deeply impressed upon glancing through the French doors, to see that no head turned to satisfy a curiosity. Such was the Jacobs' discipline.

School Hours

The school closed at 3 p.m., and shortly thereafter Mr. Jacobs could be seen striding along the sidewalk of Tremont St. (We had a sidewalk then to safeguard pedestrians from the cart and carriage traffic). Approaching the head of Harrison St., did he take a short diagonal cut? Oh no, he

continued a rod more to the north, turned at right angles, faced east, stepped on a large flat stone that bridged the gutter and continued his homeward journey down the street. That was one of the fixed habits of C. F. Jacobs. Locally that stone was known as Jacobs' Bridge; it is preserved by Mrs. Charles Bittenger.

Hoping to cultivate wider fields, Mr. Jacobs thriftily set aside a part of his salary for a purpose. In 1888 he resigned to spend a year in Paris polishing his use of the French language and extending his horizon. Upon departing my father drove him to the station. I can see him now starting on his great adventure, wearing his silk hat, as was the custom, on occasion, with those of the professions.

Mr. Pinkham succeeded, but of whom I know little as I was in Boston during his tenure. I do recall passing him one day - he was wearing a silk hat.

Enters the Academy

Having passed the entrance examination in September 1892, I enrolled in Partridge Academy with a feeling of awe. This needless apprehension quickly passed away in the friendly, easy-going regime of Thomas H. H. Knight. He was a man who devoted his unquestioned talents to the imparting of knowledge. So engrossed was he in this pursuit that discipline seemed to be secondary. Apparently he felt that students 12-17 years of age were responsible. If so, with the girls, he was correct, but with a few of the boys he was somewhat mistaken.

Mr. Knight was a smallish, mustached, gentle bundle of energy. The dignity of the silk hat period passed with him. He took his place at bat, ran with the football and joined in the May-basket-hanging parties, losing no respect, but gaining a camaraderie with his student that bordered on affection.

The Academy building consisted of a huge room upstairs, lighted brightly by a large skylight. It was used for general school assemblies and community affairs. There, Miss Hannah Semmes, the assistant, held classes. She was an efficient teacher, highly respected and a fine person. Downstairs one entered a vestibule, stairs and girls' room to the right and to the left the combined principal's room and laboratory - if it could be so dignified; at least we made some experiments there. Inside the French doors was the main school room with about 60 solid mahogany desks, girls to the right side of the main aisle, boys to the left.

Mr. Knight's long desk was at the far end of a raised platform. Above him hung the portrait of the Honorable George Partridge (now in the Ezra Weston House) with the hope, no doubt, of inspiring the boys towards noble achievements. The principal's desk was flanked by 2 monitors' desks. They were occupied by 2 of the more brilliant pupils - Miss Elizabeth Sampson (Mrs. Paul Peterson) to the right and Miss Lizzie Delano to the left. Why these young ladies were selected for this honor I do not know, but strongly suspect it was in recognition of their distinction of having entered the Academy at the early age of 10! The late, much-missed, Harry B. Bradley was the only boy to my knowledge, to share this achievement.

In the left corner was a glass case filled with instruments to demonstrate various principles of physics - which we then called natural philosophy. In front of the



This picture, found in the Gershom Bradford house by the Historical Society, was identified by him as follows: "It being found in my house, indicates that it was taken when I attended the Academy - 1892-1896. Mr. Knight was principal. The fellow with football in front left, I identify as Knowles Parker, son of John Parker I, who owned the golf course property - dairy farm. Harry Tammet in front to the left of boy with buttons on his coat. I think I am the boy to the left of the girl in white in the middle of the picture."

principal's desk were 2 settees, right and left, for recitations.

Methods of Instruction

Mr. Knight had his own methods of instruction. If I am not in error, questions and answers were at a minimum, he did most of the talking. In English literature this was especially true. He analyzed the *Merchant of Venice* line by line, commenting on the selection of meaningful words, the flow of the sound, the rhythm. He would take an adjective from a sentence, call attention to its duty to serve the poem, its strength, aptness. He showed how fittingly words were put together, not only to convey, but to crystalize the thought. *Paradise Lost*, *Snowbound* and others were similarly dissected.

In plane trigonometry Mr. Knight was also unusual. One morning when illustrating a problem with chalk, I clearly remember that he deprecated the blackboard as a vehicle of instruction. "Get your hats and coats," he ordered. Outside he appeared with a sextant and steel tape. We walked out in front of the Town House where he said, in effect, "I've heard many guesses as to the height of the church steeple. Let us find out." One of us took the end of the tape to the church's foundation a distance of say 200 feet was measured. At that point Mr. Knight, with the sextant, measured the angle between the weathervane and the ground level at the foundation. He then explained that the tangent of the angle just read,

height of the steeple. It proved to be close to 125 feet, as I recall. We laid out baseball diamonds by measured angles and other problems. Thus enlivening dull theorems.

It was in bookkeeping that our principal really loaded himself with work. Each member of the senior class was set up in "business," one coal and lumber, one textiles, etc. Chits were used for money. Each was given a credit of \$5,000 at the bank (Mr. Knight). We were required to make a certain number of transactions each day, keep a day book, deal with the bank, keep double entry ledger, submit a balance sheet, etc. Only a few years ago 2 old students told me that they began their careers in Boston with what they received from this course.

I am bearing in mind that the classes were small and that a teacher can do much with few that cannot be done with many.

Wide Range of Subjects

Although mathematics, English literature and Latin were quite thoroughly covered, I recall that there was some criticism over the wide range of other subjects treated in the junior and senior years. Necessarily the coverage was superficial. Yet I have found it an advantage to have a speaking acquaintance with current topics, physics, botany, civil government, ancient history, added to the logarithm of 200 feet, gave us the logarithm of the music and chemistry. It was not amiss to learn how the Greeks

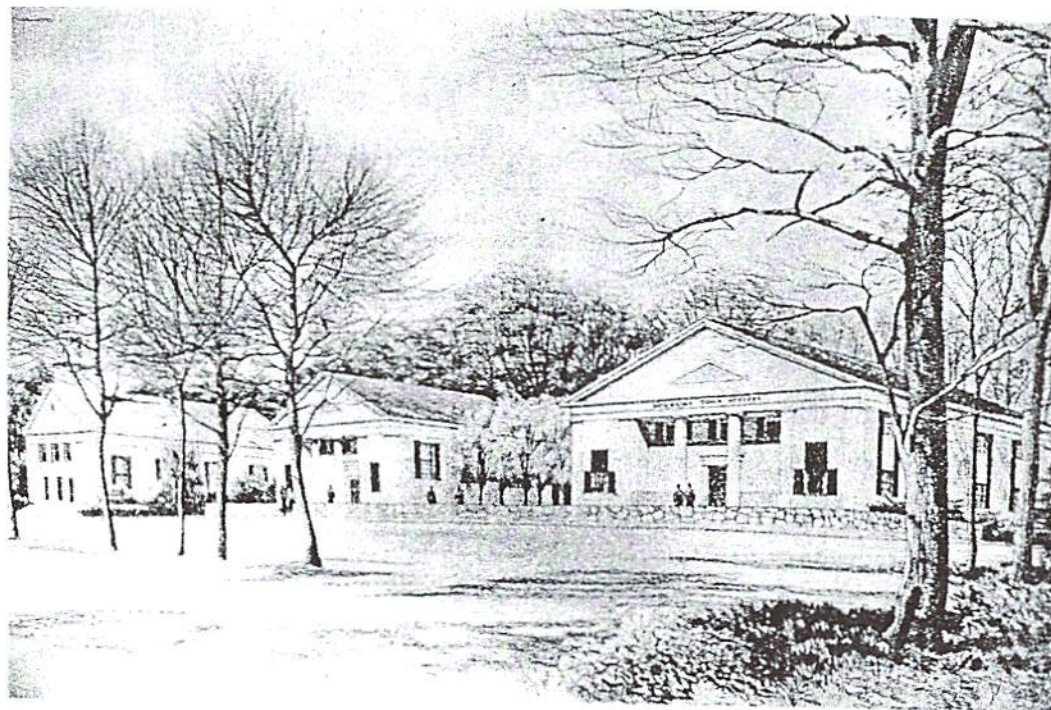
dramatically repelled the Persian armies, even if one did not know all the details of the various regimes. The little physics I acquired in my senior year stood me in good stead in later years, for a ship's officer lives with the laws of forces.

I respect the accomplished instructor who patiently imparts knowledge to his students up to, or even beyond, the required standards, but I lean strongly towards him who so inspires his pupils that they later feel impelled to augment their education on their own initiative. So much can pleasantly be learned from conversation with those better informed on a subject than one's self - if the interest is there. Mr. Knight was a creator of interest.

Wins Diploma

Notwithstanding all this, in my senior year I succumbed to various diversions and while I succeeded in passing some subjects, algebra was shrouded in fog. My graduation was in danger. Mr. Knight explained the situation to my cousin, Frederick B. Knapp of Powder Point School. Quickly I was ordered to the Point, 3 nights a week, where Cousin "Fred" hammered some light into my brain. I dragged my keel over the reef and floated free with my diploma - won without distinction.

Despite my lost opportunity to make shining grades, Mr. Knight had forged an appreciation of good literature and introduced me to the triangle, with its wide applications, which I have used in



Architect's rendition of new Town Hall now near completion to duplicate the old Partridge Academy.

the navigation of ships - perhaps even more in the instruction of others to assume the responsibilities of the bridge.

If I have appeared fulsome in my appraisal of Mr. Knight I fall back on what happened. Someone, somehow in the Boston School System learned of this country teacher. He was snatched from Duxbury to take a place in the Boston English High, where, I understand, he spent the rest of his active life.

A Tribute

Long years after my association with my old teacher I was a dinner guest in Boston. Entering into conversation with a gentleman, who was connected with Harvard, I told of the methods of my Academy instructor. The gentleman's expression lighted as he said, "Why, that man was 30 years ahead of his time."

I am happy to have this opportunity to pay tribute to my old school - the Town's school, and tardily hang a wreath, as it were, to the memory of Thomas H. H. Knight.